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Answering the call



MICHELLE ALLENBERG
/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Rev. Garry Van Bruchem from Fonthill United Church and co-chairs Lyn Taylor, left, and Rhonda Baker are representative of the Pelham Syrian Refugee Constituent Group. The group consisting of 12 members hopes to raise \$50,000 to sponsor two Syrian refugee families. Please see story Page 5.



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The long train to GO Niagara

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

Under any other circumstance, the premier of Ontario trapped in gridlock, leaving a Niagara delegation waiting, would be a source of annoyance.

The collection of Niagara politicians and staff were anxious for the meeting. They had lost their opportunity to sit down with Kathleen Wynne and her transportation minister, Steven Del Duca, more than a month earlier when the premier dissolved the legislature and called an election.

Oct. 23, 2014, represented a second chance to convince Queen's Park to expand GO rail service to Niagara, with commuter stops in Grimsby, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

The delegation waiting at White Oaks Resort in Niagara-on-the-Lake had data, including a positive environmental assessment from the body that governs GO, Metrolinx, to support their case. More critically, they had something that almost always eludes politicians in Niagara — a united front.

The typical parochialism Niagara is known for was cast aside. All 12 mayors, the regional chairman and all of regional council stood together to speak in a single voice on an issue many of them labelled a "game-changer".

But the premier was late, creeping forward in dense traffic on the Queen Elizabeth Way. And had this been a meeting about anything other than trains, the delay might have hobbled the delegation's efforts.

Instead, it helped prove a point.

"Someone asked me afterwards if I had put ticks on the highway, and I said, 'I thought of it, you're damn right I would have'," says Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati. "But the reality is,

the premier getting stuck in traffic and being late for a meeting in Niagara made the point clearer than we could have. We need GO rail in Niagara."

Part of the case for GO rail to Niagara is the assumption that it would reduce congestion on the QEW and 406 highways, which slows down the movement of people and goods, which costs money across several sectors.

Del Duca says the gridlock problem is one impacting most of southern Ontario that doesn't just cost money but wastes time for life for many people.

Whether it was the object lesson of Wynne being stuck in traffic, the delegation's presentation or both, the meeting at White Oaks changed the direction of the effort to bring the rail service to the region.

According to people in attendance, the premier instructed key provincial staff to start working closely with the regional delegation to put together a comprehensive business case for the expansion of GO rail into Niagara.

A resulting report — compiled in consultation with both the MTO and Metrolinx — was first published in April 2015. Since then, the regional working group has revised the report to answer a series of questions from the province. The document is now under final review by Queen's Park.

"I don't think there is anything more the region can do," says St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley. "I think they have done a very good job of putting their case forward and answering all the questions the provincial government has."

With the hard work done in Niagara, all the region can do is wait, Bradley says.

Everyone involved in the Niagara GO plan — from regional chairman Alan Caslin to Ontario's minister of transport

— suggest the timing for a possible expansion into the region could not better.

"There is an alignment happening between the municipal, provincial and now the federal government, which is promising billions more in infrastructure funding," says Del Duca. "No one wants to drag a process on longer than necessary and I think we are getting very close to making some very exciting announcements."

Along with its completed business plan, the region is putting money where its mouth is. The projected costs for a Niagara GO expansion is between \$100 million and \$120 million.

Caslin says the project will likely follow other large infrastructure efforts whereby local, provincial and federal governments share costs. To that end, the region has set aside \$10 million for GO expansion, with regional council ready to commit another \$30 million.

"We're ready," Caslin says. Niagara may be overestimating but it has been to bringing GO rail to Niagara, but the road to get this point has been a long one.

Talk about commuter GO service in Niagara predates the 2009 launch of a summer service to Niagara Falls. But it didn't get serious legs until spring 2011. Metrolinx was exploring GO expansion ideas and released an environmental assessment report about expansion to Niagara. It invited local politicians to comment on the report.

Diodati says he and former St. Catharines mayor Brian McCallum saw the request for commentary as an opportunity to push GO Niagara from a hypothesis into a political reality.

"So we put a motion before regional council, asking for council to support the idea of GO rail to Niagara Falls with stops in St. Catharines and

Grimsby," Diodati says. "We got unanimous support."

The next two years saw some attempts drive the agenda forward, including Diodati pushing for Niagara GO expansion to happen in time for the 2015 Pan Am Games.

Local politicians were also advocating the idea when they travelled to Queen's Park for "Niagara Week" — an annual session when Niagara leaders can meet with provincial politicians to lobby for support on local issues.

Many local leaders saw GO as a key economic driver for the region, and were growing frustrated with what they perceived as a cold shoulder from Queen's Park and Metrolinx.

Businesses were unable to attract talent from outside Niagara because there is no rail commute to Hamilton or Toronto, Diodati says. Brock University and Niagara College get passed over by students living outside the region, and local residents lose job opportunities outside Niagara.

No amount of saying this was making a difference, however. Diodati says part of the problem was the fractured political message coming from Niagara.

Instead of a pitch coming from the whole region, GO was part of a series of requests from several Niagara municipalities. Grimsby would ask for one piece of the puzzle, while St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls were asking for other parts. It gave the impression that while GO was on the radar, it wasn't that pressing an issue.

"The problem is that if everything is a priority then nothing is a priority," says Diodati. "We had to get on the same page."

By 2014 it was obvious Niagara had to come together politically to become part of Metrolinx's expansion plans.

Led by then regional chairman Gary Burroughs, the region and all 12 mayors issued a joint public letter saying that GO Niagara was their highest priority.

During the Niagara Falls provincial byelection, the mayors issued another letter asking candidates where they stood on GO.

Then in March, Burroughs said that with the support of council and the mayors, Niagara Week would focus on a subject — GO.

Although agendas were drawn up and meetings scheduled, Niagara Week plans died when Wynne scuttled the legislation and called an election.

The Liberal government returned to office, however, and the meeting at White Oaks was scheduled.

Four days after that meeting, Ontario municipal elections changed Niagara's political landscape. Key players on the GO file, including McCallum, Niagara-on-the-Lake Mayor David Eke and Lincoln Mayor Bill Hodgson were defeated or did not seek re-election. Burroughs, the face of Niagara's GO efforts, was replaced as regional chairman by Caslin.

By that time, however, GO was utterly ingrained as a regional priority, even for new council members, Caslin says.

"Everyone recognizes that GO is a net benefit for the entire region," says Caslin.

St. Catharines' new mayor, Walter Sendzik, used GO as part of his election platform, and is as committed to the project as his predecessor.

"GO is a game-changer, no question," he says. "It really will connect Niagara to the larger economy of the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area, which is how it should be."

As work began on the comprehensive business plan in

early 2015, Sendzik says no cracks in Niagara's united front were evident.

"There certainly was never a moment that I can recall where it had to convince someone to stay at the table," Sendzik says.

"Everyone gets it."

While the new plan was being put together with the help of a former Metrolinx consultant, a Niagara GO awareness campaign was launched that included rallies, web commercials and a letter-writing campaign.

The province was receptive to the report when it was finished in April, but sent back a list of 17 questions.

"We've been working very hard and co-operatively to answer those questions," Caslin says.

One of those questions had the potential to derail the plan — crossing the Welland Canal. Initially, the proposed GO schedule included a built-in 20-minute delay to accommodate the bridge being raised for passing ships on the canal. While clever, the solution was still problematic for Metrolinx, which found the delay too disruptive to the overall train schedule.

Caslin says talks with St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. resulted in an amendment to the plan. GO trains will get priority if both a ship and a train are about to intersect at the canal.

As united as lower tier municipal leaders are on the project, there are some dissenting voices.

Niagara Centre Liberal MP Wade Badaway says while he supports the idea, a GO expansion won't happen until Niagara has its own fully integrated regional transit system up and running.

See GO Page 3

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Canada Games bid pondered for region

KARENA WALTER
Postmedia Network

Proponents of a Niagara 2021 Canada Summer Games bid say the event could bring \$85 million to \$100 million to the region in investment and spending.

Niagara Sport Commission members were in Toronto Wednesday for the launch of the Canada Games Council bidding process to learn about requirements and timelines.

The commission is investigating what it would take to make a regional bid application to host the largest multi-sport event in Canada.

Niagara is primed for something like this, said commission CEO Bram Cotton Wednesday.

"My hope is that we can get the mayors and the regional politicians to stand up and say 'You know what, we want the games. It's our time.'"

St. Catharines city council unanimously supported a Niagara bid in principle last Monday after a presentation by the not-for-profit organization and a report by city staff.

The commission will be visiting Niagara Falls and Welland councils soon and the regional government on Feb. 25 for support.

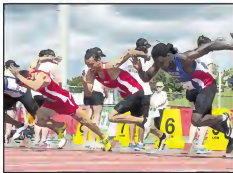
Held every four years, the summer games could see an estimated 4,600 athletes, coaches and managers from 17 sports converge in Niagara for a 16-day event.

Ontario is confirmed to host the 2021 games — the third time in the province — and it will be up to individual regions or municipalities to make their cases.

St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik attended the meeting in Toronto Wednesday and when looking at what it takes to pull off the games and how expensive it is, he thinks Niagara could crack the top three places to stage it.

"I think it's right within our wheelhouse as a region to do this," he said, adding Niagara can check off the boxes on what it can offer, whether boating on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie to cycling through Short Hills.

He said it costs about \$30 million to put on the games with \$10.3 million from the province, a similar amount from the federal government and the rest expected from sponsorships and ticket sales. Sendzik said he reviewed the past few games and the infrastructure and sport legacy



PHIL CHASSON/CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO

Sprint phenom Andre De Gasse, second from right, takes his start to go on to win the gold medal in the men's 100 metre race at the Canada Games on Aug. 15, 2013, in Sherbrooke, Que.

is impressive. Unlike larger events like the Olympics, he said the Canada Games don't lose money and communities have made additional dollars back.

Cotton said the last summer games in Sherbrooke in 2013 left a \$510,000 surplus and \$2 million in a financial legacy fund. The games in P.E.I. in 2009 had a \$3.3-million surplus.

It's not known how many Ontario areas will make bids, but a regional sport tourism office in Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph has expressed interest publicly.

Cotton estimated Niagara has about 85 per cent of the infrastructure and venues necessary to host the games and is in a better position than many places.

"We're proposing a Niagara region-wide bid because it will probably be very difficult for St. Catharines or Welland or Niagara Falls on their own. It's very involved, very complex," Cotton said. "There will be many municipalities that will kick the tires and look but they're not going to meet some of the basic technical requirements."

Niagara's biggest deficit is a stadium for track and field events that would also serve as the site of opening and closing ceremonies.

That's not a "make or break," Cotton said, explaining there are other track and field facilities Niagara could make due with. But a new facility would be a great legacy piece for generations to use, he said.

Niagara could also use more 50-metre pools and a dive tank.

Cotton said there's an

opportunity for infrastructure money through the event to build or upgrade facilities.

The commission's plan is to hold events in as many Niagara municipalities as possible, while doing what's most beneficial for the athletes to compete at a high level, he said.

While St. Catharines would be the obvious choice for rowing and Welland for flatwater events, other sports such as beach volleyball, baseball and soccer have multiple options

for locations. Sports such as cycling and triathlon would cross more than one municipality border.

"Those decisions happen much further down the road from where we're at right now," Cotton said. "For us, the big thing is how do we get Niagara to agree we need to be in the game, and once we're in the game we can have those wider, larger types of discussions."

If Niagara Sport Commission does move forward with the bidding process, a letter of intent is due on May 20. The bid fee is about \$30,000, Cotton said.

In July the Canada Games Council will complete site visits and do preliminary bid evaluations. It short-lists eligible bid cities in August. Comprehensive bids and evaluations would happen in the new year with a winning bid announced in April 2017, the year the games will be held in Winnipeg.

Niagara Sport Commission has just come off a successful venture with the 2016 IIHF Under-18 Women's World Championship in St. Catharines, which broke the event's ticket sales.

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'I don't want to commit to a time frame and then miss it'

FROM PAGE 2

"The reality is, in my opinion, until we get an integrated transit system in Niagara, GO won't realistically consider Niagara as a destination."

Technically speaking, regional transit is not a prerequisite for GO train service. However, the region is pushing toward a new Niagara-wide transit system, Caslin says.

Both Sendzik and DiDadi say they would be willing to dissolve their city's transit commissions in favour of a unified Niagara transit system, provided their communities still get the service they have today and other municipalities pay into the system.

The GO report itself says that "pieces have also been put into motion to finalize a regional transportation master plan, and are pending favourable provincial decisions on GO rail expansion."

The plan is now completed and in the hands of the provincial government.

While Niagara politicians say they are confident their quest

will end in success, Queen's Park has given no direct public indication of its plans and won't guarantee an expansion to the region.

MetroLinx's strategic plan for the next five years does not mention Niagara, However, Del Duca says the province wants to take advantage of new federal infrastructure dollars and expects to act sooner rather than later.

That said, he will not say when an announcement will be coming other than to say the province is moving as quickly as it can.

"Part of what I have to do is manage expectations," Del Duca says. "This proposal has many moving parts. Unlike other regions, we are dealing with the Seneca and CN ownership on the lines. So we have to talk with them, and we are having those talks. But I don't want to commit to a time frame and then miss it."

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We need a good phrase-changer

DOUG HERO

Postmedia Network

We need the game changed in Niagara.

The exact nature of the game is a little unclear and the change agent varies quite a bit, but make no mistake about it — the need is there. The most popular change agent these days is GO Transit, specifically its commuter rail service. Assorted boosters and politicians of all stripes stress its importance. St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik drove home the point yet again in a news story last week.

"GO is a game changer, no question," said Sendzik. Indeed, anything to do with GO has that sort of aura about it.

For instance, last year Niagara Region spent about \$400,000 preparing and then promoting a business plan for the rail service.

"This was the game changer we've been looking for," said Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati of the lobbying effort.

But it's not just GO that could be our word of the week.

Why, just last week at Niagara Region, council voted in support of a basic

income guarantee.

"This is something that can be a game changer across the country," said Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn.

It can be highly localized, too, as in the case of Welland city council recommending tax breaks be given to a food-processing plant looking to locate in the Rose City last year.

"This is a real game changer for the city of Welland," said Coun. Jim Larouche.

Or take the case of a three-day icewine event held at the Niagara Falls convention centre in January 2015.

It's a "real game changer" because it will attract tourists to the city at a dead time of year, said the event organizer.

In Niagara Falls, though, people usually have grander aspirations. You know, like the hope Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. will approve a new large-venue entertainment complex.

Such a facility, opined Niagara Casinos spokesman Greg Medulian in July 2014, would be a "game changer" for not only the casinos but for the entire destination area.

And don't dismiss the impact of other major private

investments, such as Ivanhoe Cambridge's outlet mall off the QEW in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"I think it's a game changer for Niagara region," said regional Coun. Andy Petrovski when the Region's planning committee supported the mall's rezoning bid in 2012.

Or what about Brock University's Cannabis Family Health and Bioscience Research Complex? A "game changer," said Jeff Chesebrough, Brock's director of innovation and incubation, in August 2012.

That rings a bell when recalling thoughts expressed about expanding the scope of the Niagara District Airport. "It's a game changer," said consultant Kent Myers in 2013, of bringing commercial air traffic to Niagara.

Speaking of transportation, then-Welland mayor Barry Sharpe was happy to hear three years ago about the proposed highway link between Fort Erie and Highway 406.

"It's a game changer in terms of the industrial and logistics sector for Niagara," said Sharpe.

The southern end of the peninsula might have



ALAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA

been out of mind in 2010 when then-boss of the St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce Walter Sendzik mused about the need for Niagara to tap into a green energy incentive program recently announced by the province.

It could be "a potential

game changer," said Sendzik.

And let's not forget the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre and the Meridian Centre in downtown St. Catharines.

A "game changer," said then-mayor Brian McMullan of the arts centre in March 2011.

Not to be outdone or beaten to the punch, Wendy Wing, Rankin Construction's vice-president of finance, made a bold declaration after her firm got the nod for building the puck palace in October 2012.

"It will be a game changer," said Wing.

There are under-the-radar happenings, too. Take, for instance, the experience of Kevin Neufeld, proprietor of the Beau Chapeau Hat Shop in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

When Kate Middleton became engaged to Prince William in 2011, her favoured headwear flew off the shelves of his store.

What she chooses to wear on any given day is a game changer for his business, said Neufeld.

All good stuff, I'm sure you'd agree. Combining some of it would be even better, though.

Imagine if Kate Middleton rode the inaugural Niagara GO train and it made a special stop near Niagara-on-the-Lake's outlet mall where she got out and bought a hat. Our heads would explode!

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Niagara would benefit as a whole with GO service

ALLAN BENNER

Postmedia Network

Vince Badway says bringing the GO train to Niagara is needed "sooner rather than later" — but he doubts it will happen unless Niagara first resolves its own transportation issues.

"There's no question I would support it, but the reality is it isn't going to happen," the Niagara-Centre Liberal MP said.

"The reality is, in my opinion, until we get an

integrated transit system in Niagara, GO won't realistically come across as a destination.

"If I'm wrong it's great," he said. "But let's face it, GO is not here yet, and I think there's some reasoning behind that."

He said extending GO train to Niagara would "open up the region both for economies as well as lifestyle."

"There's no question that folks moving in and out of Niagara could utilize a service such as GO on an

hourly, daily basis," he said. But it's equally important, he said, to have an inter-municipal transit system in Niagara in order to be able to access GO train stations from anywhere in the region.

While Niagara Region staff and councillors have been "doing the best they can" to make GO train service a reality in Niagara, Badway said that would happen "a lot sooner rather than later" if inter-municipal transit was operating simultaneously.

He said Ottawa may be

able to help in the meantime.

"The federal government has been very clear within our infrastructure fund that we're going to spend \$68 billion towards transit. And there's an opportunity as well ... that an application can be made" for funding. Although it doesn't seem that the GO train would be heading into south Niagara — if it ever does arrive — the entire region is expected to benefit.

"I think it is definitely a win for all of Niagara," said Dolores Fabiano, executive

officer of south Niagara's chambers of commerce.

"More people are commuting farther and farther for work, but they want to maintain that lifestyle here." She said GO train service would give people an easy option for doing that, regardless of where they live in the region.

Port Colborne Mayor John Maloney said driving to Niagara to catch a GO train would certainly be preferable to driving all the way to Toronto.

"Anyone who has driven into Toronto recently can appreciate the congestion that is there every day, and certainly in bad weather it's even worse," he said.

Although south Niagara communities would not benefit to the same extent as communities directly visited by the train, "if it brings economic development into Niagara, then we will definitely benefit from that as well," Maloney said.

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Pelham group resettling Syrian refugees

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
PostMedia Network

As more people become displaced in the Middle East, a Pelham group is working to help those in need.

War and unrest has plagued Syria for five years, leaving millions of people displaced in neighbouring countries. There are more than four million registered Syrian refugees according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the government of Turkey. The need for assistance is constantly growing and Canadians are

doing their part to give a helping hand.

The Pelham Syrian Refugee Constituent Group (PSRCG) was formed in December with the goal of relocating two Syrian refugee families to Niagara.

"Because of the humanitarian crisis, it's so evident right now, there are so many who are in such desperate straits," said group co-chair Lyn Taylor about choosing to resettle Syrian refugees.

"You think about the people who are making the decision to put their children onto a boat in terrible envi-

ronments and land on an unfriendly land. That is just horrifying to think about,"

Fellow co-chair Rhonda Baker said many people feel that helping one family doesn't make a difference, but she believes it does make a difference — every little bit counts.

The Canadian government has made a pledge to bring in 25,000 refugees from Syria.

"The government has asked the churches to respond to this ... the churches have a long history of sponsoring refugees," said Rev. Gary Van Bruchem

of Fonthill United Church. "They were around for the Cambodian boat people, or people from Bosnia. So this is something churches do."

The Pelham group comprises 12 members from the community and four Pelham churches. It is working with the United Church of Canada to sponsor two families with five to seven members in each family.

PSRCG is pursuing the Blended Visa Office Referral program. It is a cost-sharing arrangement between the group and Citizenship and Immigration

Canada. The local group will provide one-half of monthly income costs for one year and the Canadian government will pay the remaining half.

PSRCG plans to raise \$50,000 to pay for startup costs involved when settling a family. The funds will pay for housing, food, utilities and any housewares. Once the group has raised \$13,000, an application for sponsorship can be completed for the first family.

Lin Zavitz, settlement plan co-ordinator, is asking the community to contact

her with information about housing opportunities. She can be reached at 905-892-0032.

Donations can be made at RBC in Fenwick and Fonthill. All cheques are to be made out to 'Fonthill United Church' noting 'Pelham Syrian Refugee Constituent Group' on the memo line. Cheques can be mailed to Fonthill United Church, Box 926, Fonthill, Ont., L2S 1E0.

For more information and to donate online, visit www.fonthillunited.com.

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HILIE ADDESAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORKS

St. Catharines mayor Walter Sendzik gives his state of the city address at Club Roma.

Southern-tier mayors luncheon a good gauge of progress

DOLORES FABIANO
Social to Postmedia Network

In the coming months there will be a number of state of the city addresses by our local mayors. These events are a good opportunity to hear from our elected officials, not only for what their achievements have been to date, but also what the plans are for the immediate and long-term future.

In south Niagara, the chambers of commerce have been presenting a unique spin on this event. For the past decade, we have been hosting the Southern Tier Mayors Luncheons, which gives our members the opportunity to hear six mayors on one stage on one day. Some may regard this as a nightmare, and I can understand that initial reaction.

For years now, the Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne-Wainfleet and Welland-Pelham chambers of commerce have collaborated on presenting this event. The respective mayors of each of these six communities have come together time and again to provide us with a little more than what one might expect.

The biggest complaint we consistently hear about in Niagara is that no one ever works together. That we are never on the same page, we never speak with one voice and we just can't get our act together.

The goal of the participating chambers of commerce 10 years ago (when we initially kicked this off) was to get our mayors together so they could deliver their messages as a group. That way, we could all start to see where the opportunities to work closer together might be, and how we could support each other's initiatives. To be fair, years one and two may have been a little disappointed. There was

definitely a learning curve for everyone involved.

The format, however, has evolved into an excellent opportunity for our mayors to work together and bring their message to the business community. It demonstrates how – contrary to popular opinion – the mayors are in fact working together and supportive of the things that are happening across the region.

There have certainly been issues where they have not agreed, and it has been interesting to watch them navigate those topics. Each mayor is most concerned about the municipality they represent, just as the chambers are most concerned about their respective members. This is as it should be.

But leadership is the ability to see something beyond your own backyard, and have the vision to help move it forward for the greater good. I encourage everyone to come out to this year's event to see what I mean. See that we do have great leadership, and that partnership across the region does exist. This luncheon is an example of just that.

We look forward to hosting the 2016 Southern Tier Mayors Luncheon on March 22 at the Italian Hall in Port Colborne. Registration starts at 11:30 a.m., lunch at noon, with the presentation wrapping up about 2 p.m. Tickets cost \$40 per member, \$50 for non-members, and may be purchased through Port Colborne-Wainfleet Chamber of Commerce.

This is typically a sold-out event. With limited seating, interested parties should book soon to avoid disappointment.

Dolores Fabiano is executive director of Niagara Falls, Port Colborne-Wainfleet and Welland-Pelham chambers of commerce.



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Tuesday, February 23	No Evening Class
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Public Skating	Adult Public Skating	Adult Learn to Skate	Men's Shiny Hockey	Women's Shiny Hockey	Women's Learn to Play Hockey	Pelham Panthers Home Games
Sunday, Feb 21 No Skate Tuesday, Feb 23 4:00-5:00 pm Friday, Feb 26 3:30-4:30 pm	Thursday, Feb 25 1:00-2:00 pm Parent/Preschool Tuesday, Feb 23 1:00-2:00 pm Friday, Feb 26 10:00-11:00 am	Sunday, Feb 22 1:00-2:00 pm CONTACT Julie Cook at jcook@pelham.ca or 905-892-2607 ext. 329 for details	Tuesday, Feb 23 8:00-9:00 am Friday, Feb 26 9:00-10:00 am	Monday, Feb 22 9:30-10:45 am Thursday, Feb 25 10:30-11:45 am	Thursday, Feb 25 9:30-10:30 am Hockey Skills Hour Monday, Feb 22 11:00-12:00 pm Thursday, Feb 25 2:00-3:00 pm	Tuesday, Feb 23 7:00 pm vs. Niagara Falls Friday, Feb 26 7:30 pm vs. Welland

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We will begin with "get to know you" games and activities. Indoor and outdoor activities are planned today. Starting after lunch (please bring skates, mittens and helmet), followed by a visit from author and illustrator, Barbara Reid, whose artwork with plasticine is renowned. Lunch today with the meal plan: Nature's Corner chicken quesadilla or grilled chicken, brownie and drink.	Campers are boxed to Heartland Forest in Niagara Falls – a nature experience dedicated to preservation and education (today's theme "Owls"). Campers will participate in a scavenger hunt, go on a guided forest trail hike and roast marshmallows over a campfire. Lunch today with the meal plan: Subway subs, cookie and drink.	Today will be filled with activities including "Just Dance" and a visit from the library. Sitting in the afternoon (please bring skates, mittens and helmet), followed by obstacle course races. Lunch today with the meal plan: Nature's Corner macaroni and cheese, square and a drink.	Today is St. Patrick's Day! Campers will participate in "green" activities today. Mad Science will visit in the morning and skating will take place in the afternoon (please bring skates, mittens and helmet). Lunch today with the meal plan: Mossimo's pizza, treat and a drink.	Join us for the final day of camp. Today we participate in some outdoor activities. In the morning then board the bus for a trip to Disney's "Dare to Dream" hilarious, hair-raising escapade in Hamilton. Please note that the bus will not return until approximately 5:00pm. Lunch today with the meal plan: McDonald's hamburger, fries, snack and drink.
March 14	March 15	March 16	March 17	March 18

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Arrest made after rash of pharmacy robberies

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

A Welland man faces multi-

ple criminal charges following a string of armed robberies at pharmacies across Niagara.

After more than a month of investigation since Shoppers Drug Mart was robbed

on Dec. 28 at 825 Ontario Rd. in Welland, a suspect was arrested Feb. 7 following a

robbery at Guardian Pharmacy at 155 Main St. E. in Grimsby, Niagara Regional Police Det. Sgt. Wayne Genders said.

Duane Leblanc, 33, has been charged with 14 criminal offences related to six robberies, most of which occurred in Welland. Charges against him include robbery, weapons offences and the use of a disguise while committing a crime.

As each subsequent robbery occurred, Genders said, Welland's detectives have been "kind of looking at everything in the region, and talking to each detective office."

With each robbery, he said, detectives gathered additional evidence.

"It kind of all came together. And when that one came in (Sunday), the team that was working jumped right on it."

In addition to the Dec. 28 and Feb. 7 robberies, police said the suspect faces charges

related to robberies at Shoppers Drug Mart at 5175 Victoria Ave. Niagara Falls on Jan. 2, at Retail Drug Store at 838 Ontario Rd. in Welland on Jan. 7, at Mahdiah Pharmacy at 85 Lincoln St. in Welland on Jan. 12, and at Niagara Street Pharmacy at 545 Niagara St. in Welland on Feb. 3.

Each of those robberies was committed by an armed man armed who demanded fentanyl patches from the pharmacist.

"A handgun was displayed at each of them," Genders said.

A gun, however, has not been recovered by police, he said.

Although there have been similar pharmacy robberies recently, including a robbery in Fort Erie late last week, Genders said police don't believe they're related.

"Although it does seem similar, it's not related to this one," he said.

A time to celebrate

Casablanca Winery Inn –
winner of prestigious
Couple's Choice Award

GRIMSBY Grimsby's Casablanca Winery Inn & Spa has been recognized as one of the top places in the province to get married. The Inn is a 2016 Couple's Choice Award Winner, as determined by WeddingWire.com, the leading online wedding marketplace. Each year, the website recognizes the top 5% of Wedding professionals in their network and the Couple's Choice Award is based solely on reviews from customers.

Everyone is invited to come and celebrate with Casablanca as they hold their annual Wedding Open House on Sunday, February 28th from 12-4 pm. The Open House will take place throughout the building with special Ceremony and Reception set ups, Restaurant and Spa Tours, the latest in Wedding Decor and Floral ideas, Food & Wine Sampling and a Wedding Marketplace of Vendors including DJs, Photographers, Live Bands, Wedding Officials, Cakes, Tuxedos and Wedding Gowns and much more. Guests will also have a chance to win a door prize or the Grand Prize – a 1 night stay in a Luxury Suite at Casablanca.



The beautiful grand staircase at Casablanca Winery Inn is perfect for wedding photos.

Whether you're considering Casablanca for a Wedding, Bridal Shower, Engagement Party or any other social or corporate event, there is a great day to come in for a look. There is no cost to attend this Open House, but organizers are requesting that visitors bring a non-perishable food item to be donated to the Grimsby Benevolent Fund.

For more information and to RSVP, please call 905-309-7171, 1-877-446-5746, email rspv@casablanacwineryinn.com or go online to www.casablanacwineryinn.com/upcoming-events.



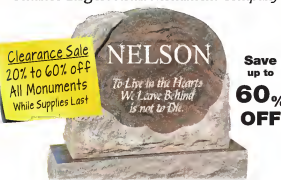
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Off road, but no spill



FRANK IREMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

A truck carrying diesel went off the road on Forks Road near the border of Welland and Wainfleet last Wednesday. Both Welland and Wainfleet fire departments initially responded to what ended up being a Wainfleet call. A firefighter on scene said no diesel was spilled during the incident.

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PortColborneOperaticSociety.com

Community keeps giving to Cosentino family

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Two brothers hospitalized with severe burns as a result of a Welland garage fire were recently upgraded to stable condition.

Rob Cosentino, 50, and his brother Cesar Cosentino, 56, were working on a car at 76 Hunter Dr. in on Jan. 30 when a spark from a work light ignited gasoline causing a \$500,000 blaze.

The two men were taken to different hospitals with severe burns. Rob was airlifted to Hamilton General and Cesar to Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto to receive treatment.

Rob's wife, Rosa Cosentino, said last Tuesday that the brothers are both stable condition and undergoing skin graft surgeries.

She said they are both in induced comas. She hasn't had a chance to speak to either of them since the fire.

"They are hanging in there — one day at a time. I'm keeping positive thoughts," she said.

Rosa's sister-in-law and son work at the Sobey's store located on nearby South Pelham Road.

Sobey's franchise owner Mike Zolli has

decided to help the Cosentinos by collecting money and gift cards.

Assistant manager Karen Rousseau said the tragedy has touched many people, including those who work with Rosa and Rob's teenage son.

"It's a very close store ... a lot of them have been working together for 20 years or more. It's touched a lot of people in the store and in the community. Welland is a small community," Rousseau said.

The store started collecting donations last week. Rousseau said as of last Monday \$3,200 had been raised. She said people are also donating gift cards and are offering to donate clothing.

"Whatever people would like to donate, gift cards are great. Whatever people are comfortable doing. Mike will make sure it will go right to the family," she said.

People can donate at the customer service desk between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

Rosa said it has been "wonderful to see the community come together" for her family.

Last Tuesday afternoon a Go Fund Me page set up by Rosa's aunt, Georgina Seriani, had raised almost \$24,000.

To make a donation visit "For the Cosentino Family Fire" at www.gofundme.com/szmgvbc.

Southern Ontario border agents busy in late 2015

ALISON LANGLAY
Postmedia Network

Border officers seized more guns in southern Ontario in the last half of 2015 than anywhere else in Canada.

According to a news release issued Tuesday, Canada Border Services Agency seized 163 guns and 348 prohibited weapons in its southern Ontario region during that time frame.

On July 21, for example, four handguns and an assault rifle were seized from a Toronto resident at Rainbow Bridge.

All told, 28 firearms and 32 prohibited weapons were seized at Rainbow Bridge.

More than 30 firearms and 105 prohibited weapons were seized the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie in the last half of 2015 and border officers at the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge seized 11 firearms and 15 prohibited weapons.

"Our officers work diligently to pro-

tect the safety and security of Canadians," Rick Comerford, regional director general of CBSA's southern Ontario region, said in the release.

Border agents at the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge in October 2015 seized undeclared porcelain originating from China with a value of more than \$31,000.

Undervalued paintings valued at \$44,654 were seized in October.

The CBSA's Niagara Frontier region, which includes Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, London and Windsor, seized more than \$100,000 worth of undeclared art and china and \$1.8 million in cash.

There were also five jewelry seizures at the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge including one in November when jewelry with a declared value of \$3,200 was determined to have an actual value of \$12,400.

Officers made 678 drug seizures in the last half of 2015, including 26 cocaine seizures totalling nearly 84 kilograms.

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Church marks a milestone

MICHELLE ALLENBERG

POSTMEDIA NETWORK

What makes the First Baptist Church of Welland stand the test of time is its commitment to serving the community, members say.

The church celebrated its 160th anniversary last Friday.

Pastor René Brochu said when he began working at the church in 2001 there were only about 40 members. But through hard work, he and his team have managed to increase that to about 140 members.

Brochu said being active and willing to share and serve the city of Welland has assisted with the increase of members.

"By making available ministries, such as hiring a youth worker. Allowing people to have freedom to bring new ideas and implement them for families" has helped, Brochu said.

Part of this involves creating social activities people want to participate in. The church hosts events including movie nights, fitness programs and Spanish services.

Youth outreach and worship director Nolan Beni said what also increased participation is building a group fam-

ily feeling.

"A lot of youth in the area come from broken homes and things like that. So to help build that family element to it has really helped," Beni said.

What makes the church unique, according to Beni and co-pastor Sergio Espinoza, is how multicultural it is.

Espinoza said since joining the church in 2003 he has noticed people from all different backgrounds joining in.

Espinoza, originally from Mexico, saw a need for a Spanish service. In 2006 he started the Spanish church service, Saturdays at 7 p.m.

Although the church wasn't multicultural when it began, Espinoza said it has always been a welcoming venue.

The First Baptist Church was founded Feb. 12, 1856 and moved three times. The first location was on Church Street in Merrittville, now known as Welland.

The church finally settled at 165 Sydney Place 46 years ago. The location was changed to accommodate an ever-growing congregation. In 1958, the church had about 300 members. michelle.allenberg@sunmedia.ca

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Offers available on select new '15-'16 models to qualified retail customers who take delivery from Feb. 2 to 29 '16. Some conditions apply. See dealer for complete details on all offers to all. Vehicle shown may include options available at extra cost. Offers subject to change without notice. Cash discount of \$500 applies to '16 Sorento LX 4-cyl. AWD w/ each purchase price of \$28,599. Price includes \$300 cash bonus, delivery/destination fees up to \$1,725, \$5 OMVIC fee, PDR, \$29 tire fee, & \$100 A/C charge (where applicable). Excludes other special offers, air, financing, PPSA, registration, insurance, fuel up to \$100, exterior charge (if applicable), & down (if applicable). Other purchase options available. Not all offers available on '16 Sorento apply. Some cannot be combined. See dealer for details & eligibility. 0% financing for up to 60 months plus up to \$450 discount available on select '15-'16 models. Discount deducted from negotiated purchase price per car. Certain conditions apply. \$500 Autoshow Bonus available on all new '16 Sorento purchases between Feb. 8-24 '16. *\$500 CarFax Bonus offer available on retail purchase/lease of any new '16 Sorento between Feb. 2 to 29 '16 upon proof of current ownership/lease of a select competitive vehicle. Competitive models include specific VW, Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, Mitsubishi, Hyundai, Honda, GM, Ford, Jeep, Pontiac, Suzuki, Saturn, Chrysler, Chevrolet, Subaru, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Lexus, Land Rover, Infiniti, Acura, Audi, Lincoln, Volvo & Buick vehicles. Some conditions apply. See your dealer or Kia.ca for complete details. \$500 Loyalty Bonus offer available on all new '16 Sorento purchases for any current Kia customer/lessee whose current car has been properly registered & licensed for the last 90 days. *\$200 "Try For 90 Days" on all models (90-day trial deferral) applies to purchases/financing offers on all new '15-'16 models D.M.C. No interest during first 90 days of finance contract. After this period, interest starts to accrue & purchase price/principal interest solely over term of contract. Offer ends Feb. 29 '16. Customers who purchase an all-new '15-'16 Kia model between Feb. 11-Feb. 29 '16 & present this ad at time of purchase receive a \$500 credit to use toward Kia Genuine Accessories for their new vehicle. Not redeemable for cash & not transferable. Offer valid if ad is not presented at time of purchase. Offer available only at Cardinal Kia. Dealer may alter or discontinue offer at any time without notice. Visit www.facebook.com/NiagaraKia for entry details and Tony Roma's contest. Valid at Niagara Falls location only. One entry per person. Must be Ontario legal age of majority or older. No purchase necessary. Draw to take place on Feb. 14 '16. Winner will be contacted via email and must pick up the gift card in person at 7818 Oakwood Drive, Niagara Falls, ON. By entering, agreement is automatically provided to take photo of winner at time of being awarded, & photo winner being used in dealership advertising. Dealer may alter/discontinue contest at any time, with or without 30 days notice, without notice or consent to void. *Model shown MSRP for '16 Sorento SX Turbo AWD (\$30,395). The Blackstone® watermark & logo are registered trademarks & are owned by Blackstone B&B, Inc. The Sorento received lowest number of problems per 100 vehicles among midsize SUVs in proprietary J.D. Power 2015 U.S. Initial Quality Study/S&P. Study based on responses from 14,367 U.S. new-vehicle owners, measuring 244 models & measures opinion after 90 days of ownership. Proprietary study results are based on experiences & perceptions of U.S. owners surveyed from Feb. to May '15. Experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com. Info in this ad believed to be accurate at time of print. For more info on 5-yr warranty coverage, visit kia.ca or call 1-877-542-2686. Kia is a trademark of Kia Motor Corporation. E&O.E.